

## CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION PLAN

### The Challenges

We identified the following agency Strategic Goals and Objectives as those most likely affected by climate change:

**Goal 1: Eliminate Our Hearings Backlog and Prevent Its Recurrence**

Objective: Increase our capacity to hear and decide disability cases.

**Goal 2: Improve the Speed and Quality of Our Disability Process**

Objective: Make it easier and faster to file for benefits online.

**Goal 3: Improve our Retiree and other Core Services**

Objective: Improve services for individuals who visit our field offices.

**Goal 4: Preserve the Public Trust in Our Programs**

Objective: Simplify and streamline how we do our work.

In our preliminary high-level analysis, completed in September 2011, we anticipated the major potential climate change impacts to our Goals and Objectives would be:

- Increased flood frequencies or depths causing permanent displacement of office locations.
- Severe or extreme cold weather adversely affecting office operations.
- Extreme temperatures adversely affecting all modes of transportation (e.g. buckling roadways and rail lines) transporting individuals to our offices.
- Poor ambient air quality causing risk to individuals when traveling to our offices and to our employees when traveling on our business.
- Severe weather events, such as floods, hurricanes and extreme heat, disrupting the operation of our facilities and our ability to serve the public. These disruptions would affect our productivity and require us to use more resources to decide benefit applications and handle other work. For example, employees cannot handle claims or other requests from the public during power disruptions or prolonged power outages, and power outages may also make it difficult for claimants to access our online services.
- Increased temperatures and heat waves affecting our ability to cool and operate our data centers, which maintain the systems used to make benefit payments and maintain the accuracy of our records.

### 2011 High-Level SSA Climate Change Adaptation Planning Approaches

In the March 2011 SSA Policy Statement on climate change adaptation we stated our intention to prepare for a changing climate by considering climate change when making planning, purchasing, operating, and budgetary decisions, and by coordinating with other agencies and the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force. In July 2011, we established an intra-agency climate change adaptation planning team charged with developing our fiscal year (FY) 2013 adaptation action plan. The team includes representatives from the Office of Budget,

Finance and Management, the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review, the Office of Systems, and the Office of Operations.

Our preliminary high-level analysis drilled down another level from the Policy Statement, laying out high-level approaches to climate change adaptation in broad terms. First, since the (GSA) manages our facilities and occupies comparable office buildings, and since our space is sometimes co-located with GSA, we determined that the most effective starting point for improving our resiliency to a changing climate is to collaborate with GSA on three priority actions. The actions will inform our decision-making process in planning and implementing our strategy for climate change adaptation. The three priority actions are to:

- 1) **Develop Criteria for Conducting the Vulnerability Assessment** – To build upon our high-level analysis, we need a set of criteria to use in conducting a detailed assessment to identify those facilities most critical to our mission, and to assess their vulnerability and risks to climate change. *Planned Timeframe:* Completion by the end of FY 2013.
- 2) **Identify Space and Infrastructure Needed to Improve Resiliency** – Identify the space and infrastructure requirements for field offices, hearing offices, and data centers that are strategically important for improving the likelihood that we are prepared for climate change. *Planned Timeframe:* FY 2012 – FY 2013.
- 3) **Participate in a Scenario Planning Pilot** – Participate in a scenario-planning exercise with GSA as a pilot of regional climate assistance being implemented with the U.S. Global Change Research Program.

These activities will help us complete detailed vulnerability and risk assessments, giving us a better understanding of the projected climate-change risks faced by our facilities. Once the analyses are complete, we will implement the following suite of general measures listed in the preliminary high-level analysis:

- Map out our organizational approach to increasing resiliency to projected impacts;
- Determine the assets most likely to be affected, and prioritize those in our detailed adaptation plan;
- Monitor our Continuity of Operation Plan and update it as needed to ensure that it addresses potential vulnerabilities to climate change;
- Update our human resource policies and shift staffing plans as needed to align with Continuity of Operation Plan and climate change risks and vulnerabilities;
- Employ strategies to mitigate disruptions to service delivery;
- Incorporate climate change considerations into facility planning decisions, such as the Space Allocation Standard and Solicitation for Offer requirements, when selecting sites for new offices and when upgrading technology infrastructure.

The preliminary analysis also cited opportunities for collaboration with other agencies. We already share van shuttles with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)—also located in Woodlawn, MD—to transport employees on official business between Baltimore and the District of Columbia. We can better align our transportation needs, resources, and methods with CMS to minimize disruptions due to climate change. (We already have agreements that

allow CMS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to use our alternative fuel supply tanks for their fleet vehicles.) We also collaborate with GSA on construction and renovation projects, including collaboration on improved use of energy resources. Further collaboration is sensible since we occupy GSA facilities, share space with GSA in some instances, and occupy similar buildings. The Internal Revenue Service faces management and operational challenges similar to ours when addressing the effects of climate change, since we both have field offices located throughout the country and provide face-to-face services to the public.

### **SSA Process and Schedule for Developing a Detailed Adaptation Plan**

The next phase in our evolution to climate-resiliency is for our intra-agency climate change adaptation planning team to engage in a planning process that considers all potentially vulnerable components and functions in an integrated, agency-wide manner. Per instructions issued by the Council on Environmental Quality on March 1, 2012, the Adaptation Plan is to consist of the six elements shown in the table below. The table provides the month in 2012 by which we plan to complete each element.

<b>Element</b>		<b>Anticipated Completion</b>
1	Policy Framework	July 2012
2	Process for Adaptation Planning and Evaluation	August 2012
3	Analysis of Climate Change Risks and Opportunities	October 2012
4	Programmatic Activities	December 2012
5	Actions to Address Climate Change Risks and Opportunities	December 2012
6	Actions to Better Understand Climate Change Risks and Opportunities	December 2012

#### **1) Policy Framework**

We will first outline the vision, goals, and strategic approaches for managing the effects of climate change on our mission, programs, and operations.

#### **2) Process for Adaptation Planning and Evaluation**

We will develop a plan to improve our resiliency to the impacts of climate change, including processes for monitoring and evaluating progress on the plan and for distributing the plan within the agency and to relevant external stakeholders. This will be a two-step process, as once we have implemented the planning process (Element #5), we will likely want to revise the process based on lessons learned. The finalized planning process will facilitate the ongoing update of the adaptation plan, as better climate change information becomes available over time.

### **3) Analysis of Climate Change Risks and Opportunities**

We will conduct a more detailed vulnerability and risk assessment of the short and long-term risks and opportunities to our mission, programs, and operations secondary to climate change. The assessments will focus initially on the facilities identified as most critical to our mission. The analysis is a four-step process, including:

- a) Assessing future climate change impacts for different regions of the country.
- b) Assessing the vulnerability of each sector (such as electricity) and agency function. Vulnerability is the combination of the sensitivity of a given sector or function to climate change, and the capacity of that function to adapt.
- c) Assessing risk in each sector and agency function. Risk is a function of two factors: the known or estimated consequence of a given problem caused by climate change, and the probability that the climate change impact causing that problem will occur.
- d) Setting our priorities. For each sector or function, the combination of risk and vulnerability generates a ranking from very low to very high priority for action.

We will use the results of this analysis to develop our action plan.

### **4) Programmatic Activities**

These are activities to strengthen planning capacity—both within the agency and with other agencies and State, local, tribal, and territorial partners—and to integrate adaptation into our policies, programs, and operations. To build capacity internally and externally, we will reach out to internal offices and external partners to help them understand the adaptation planning process, and how to integrate adaptation into existing policies, programs, and operations. A subset of our offices should participate in the planning process, and once a draft is complete, the adaptation planning team will engage these offices in finalizing the plan.

### **5) Actions to Address Climate Change Risks and Opportunities**

Once we establish priorities (Element #4), our adaptation planning team will develop a set of goals for improving resiliency to climate change and a set of concrete actions for achieving each goal. A goal describes what we want to accomplish, and an action describes a measure to do so. For each action, we will designate the office responsible for successful implementation. Based on the prioritization exercise, we will assign the timeframe for implementing each action. Finally, we will develop a performance indicator for each action (or perhaps more than one, if warranted), providing a system for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting progress on the adaptation action plan.

### **6) Actions to Better Understand Climate Change Risks and Opportunities**

We will develop a set of actions to continue to improve our understanding of the risks posed to our mission, programs, and operations by climate change. These actions may include studies, research and analysis, or the development of tools. Since climate science continues to refine our

projections of climate change impacts, we must continually improve our understanding of the risks climate change poses to our mission to refine our adaptation plan over time.